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Committee on Sustainable Energy

Group of Experts on Gas

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Item 9 of the provisional agenda
Activities and priorities of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, its Executive Committee and the Committee on Sustainable Energy

Implications of a possible upgrade of the Group of Experts on Gas to a Working Party

Note by the secretariat

Summary

At the fourth session of the Group of Experts on Gas, a proposal was made to upgrade the Group of Experts into a Working Party. Noting this request, the Committee on Sustainable Energy requested the secretariat to analyse the implications of such an upgrade and prepare a concept note with more information for the Group of Expert's fifth session. This document puts forward two options for the Group of Experts to consider:

(a) To request the Committee on Sustainable Energy to recommend to the Executive Committee to upgrade the Group of Experts on Gas into a Working Party, with a five year mandate;

(b) To continue to work under its current four-year mandate and Terms of Reference (TOR).

The Committee requested the Group of Experts to report its recommendation(s) on this proposal to the Committee's twenty-seventh session.

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I. Introduction

1. At its twenty-sixth session held in September 2017, the Committee on Sustainable Energy noted a proposal made at the fourth session of the Group of Experts to upgrade the Group of Experts into a Working Party. The Committee requested the secretariat to prepare a concept note with more information for submission to the fifth session of the Group of Experts. The Committee further requested the Group of Experts to report its recommendation(s) on this proposal to the Committee's twenty-seventh session. This document is prepared in response to the Committee's request.

II. Background and history

2. The Group of Experts is a subsidiary body of the Committee on Sustainable Energy that examines the critical role of gas in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and provides a forum for multi-stakeholder dialogue on sustainable and clean production, distribution and consumption of natural gas in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region.

3. The Group of Experts was established in 2013 following the 2012 review of the 2005 reform of ECE. It replaced the Working Party on Gas that existed from 1991 to 2013.

III. Similarities and differences between a Group of Experts and a Working Party

4. The ECE Executive Committee (EXCOM) has guidelines for establishment and functioning of a Group of Experts and a Working Party:

(a) Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of Working Parties within UNECE[1];

(b) Guidelines for the establishment and functioning of teams of specialists within UNECE[2].

5. A Working Party is an intergovernmental body subsidiary to an ECE Sectoral Committee. It has the following characteristics:

(a) It is established by the Executive Committee upon the recommendation of a Sectoral Committee;

(b) It is authorized by the Sectoral Committee to address a major cluster of recurrent activities within a given sub-programme under the responsibility of the Sectoral Committee;

(c) It is a standing body whose mandate and extension should be reviewed every 5 years;

(d) Its meetings are held with full interpretation and translation, unless the members of the Working Party decide otherwise.

[1] https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Key_documents/01_Guidelines_WP_ECE_EX_1E.pdf

[2] https://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/commission/EXCOM/Key_documents/02-Rev1-GuidelinesTOS_ECE_EX_2-Rev1-E.pdf

6. A Group of Experts (defined in the EXCOM document as a Team of Specialists) is an expert body established by an ECE Sectoral Committee and supervised either directly by the Sectoral Committee or by one of its Working Parties. The EXCOM Guidelines describe the main characteristics of such a body as:

(a) It addresses a specific area of activities under the broader theme covered by the parent body;

(b) Its central function may be of an advisory or operational nature, or a combination of the two, depending on the tasks assigned by the parent body;

(c) It normally has a two-year duration but can be extended after careful evaluation by the parent body of the work achieved and the need to perform additional tasks.

7. The table below summarizes the key features of the two options.

Option	*Key features*
Upgrade to a Working Party	Intergovernmental body Broader scope of work Greater visibility Industry experts as observers Mode of functioning is more formal Longer mandate (renewed every five years) Non-ECE member States as observers
Continue as a Group of Experts	Advisory/operational expert body More specific scope of work Easier participation by industry experts Normally shorter mandate (renewed every two years) Lack of intergovernmental status diminishes its impact

IV. OPTIONS TO CONSIDER

8. The Group of Experts on Gas could consider two options:

(a) To request the Committee on Sustainable Energy to recommend to the Executive Committee (EXCOM) to upgrade the current Group of Experts on Gas into a Working Party;

(b) To continue its work in its current structure and with its current mandate and Terms of Reference.

9. Should the Group of Experts recommend pursuing the first option, it may consider discussing and recommending Terms of Reference for a future Working Party. A proposed draft Terms of Reference, contained in the Annex, has been prepared on the basis of the Group of Experts 2018-2019 work plan as approved by the Committee on Sustainable Energy at its twenty-sixth session, September 2017. The Terms of Reference reflects the increasingly important role of natural gas in attaining a broad array of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in ECE member States.

Annex

Draft Terms of Reference of the Working Party on Gas

The Working Party on Gas is mandated until December 2023, with possibility of extension, to carry out concrete, results-oriented activities in the work areas and with the objective mentioned below.

A. Objective

To provide a forum for multi-stakeholder dialogue on the role of gas in attaining Sustainable Development Goals in the ECE region.

B. Areas of Work

Policy dialogue and exchange of information and experience among ECE member States on:

(a) The ever-increasing share of gas in the total primary energy supply and its economic and social impacts;

(b) The relation between natural gas and the environment.

(c) Energy Security: Supply, Transit, Demand.

C. Concrete activities

Concrete activities of the Group of Experts on Gas help ECE member States deliver on key political commitments, such as the Paris Agreement on climate change and the Sustainable Development Goals. They may include:

(a) Role of gas in attaining Sustainable Development Goals;

(b) Best practices in managing methane emissions along the gas value chain;

(c) Role of gas in improving urban air quality;

(d) Synergies between renewable energy and gas;

(e) Emerging issues (biogas, hydrogen, synthetic gas, power to gas, carbon capture and storage);

(f) Promoting sustainable and clean production, distribution, and consumption of gas and LNG in the ECE region;

(g) Security of supply and demand and physical security of gas infrastructure.